

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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R 231136Z JAN 76

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7230

INFO AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY MANILA

COMUSMACTHAI BANGKOK

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: ASEAN, TH, MY

SUBJECT: FURTHER COMMENT ON VISIT TO THAILAND OF SINGAPORE

PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW

REF: BANGKOK 1352

SUMMARY: SEEN IN RETROSPECT, VISIT OF SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW TO BANGKOK JAN. 19-21 (REFTEL) DID NOT INVOLVE MUCH SUBSTANCE, BEYOND CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT AT DINNER JAN. 19. VISIT APPEARS ESSENTIALLY TO HAVE BEEN CONTINUATION OF CONVERSATION ON ECONOMIC ISSUES HELD IN KUALA LUMPUR LAST WEEK AT TIME OF FUNERAL OF LATE MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER RAZAK. LEE EMPHASIZED GETTING DOWN TO CASES IN TERMS OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION. AT HIS DEPARTURE PRESS CONFERENCE JAN. 21 LEE SAID HE THOUGHT IT WAS IN INTEREST OF ASEAN MEMBERS TO GET CLOSER TOGETHER ON ECONOMIC ISSUES, POLITICAL COORDINATION, THEN ON TO FOREIGN POLICY, INTELLIGENCE "AND BEYOND. BUT IT HAS TO BE STEP BY STEP...." END SUMMARY.

1. SEEN IN RETROSPECT, PROGRAM FOR SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER

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LEE KUAN YEW'S VISIT TO BANGKOK, JAN. 19-21, SEEMS TO HAVE

BEEN VERY LIGHT, WITH BUSINESS CONFINED TO DINNER CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT AND FOREIGN MINISTER CHATCHAI JAN. 19. ACCORDING TO SINGAPORE EMBASSY BANGKOK, VISIT TO CHIANG MAI TO MEET KING JAN. 21 WAS TO FOR PROTOCOL PURPOSES.

2. ACCORDING TO TAN SENG CHYE, COUNSELOR OF SINGAPORE EMBASSY BANGKOK, VISIT SHOULD BE SEEN AS CONTINUATION OF CONVERSATION IN KUALA LUMPUR LAST WEEK BETWEEN KHUKRIT, LEE, AND PRESIDENT MARCOS AT TIME OF FUNERAL OF THE LATE MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER, TUN RAZAK. FOCUS OF DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN KHUKRIT AND LEE JAN. 19 WAS ECONOMIC ISSUES AIMED AT GREATER INTEGRATION OF ASEAN.

3. ACCORDING TO NITYA PIBULSONGRAM, CHIEF OF SOUTHEAST ASIA DIVISION OF MFA, ONE OF PRINCIPAL CPOINTS RAISED BY LEE WAS HIS DESIRE FOR MORE SPECIFICS AND NOT GENERAL GUIDELINES AND PRINCIPLES ON ECONOMIC RELATIONS. TAN SENG CHYE MADE SAME POINT, GIVING AS EXAMPLE INTEREST OF SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT IN PETROCHEMICAL PLANT IN SINGAPORE, WITH SUMITOMO AND SINGAPORE INVESTMENT, WHOSE PRODUCTION MAY BE EARMARKED IN FIRST INSTANCE TO MEET ASEAN NEEDS. TAN FELT THAT A PAPER PLANT MIGHT BE BUILT IN INDONESIA, ALSO PRIMARILY FOR ASEAN NEEDS, AS WELL AS OTHER PLANTS IN TERRITORY OF OTHER ASEAN MEMBERS. BOTH NIT AND TAN SEPARATELY AGREED THAT THERE HAD BEEN NO BILATERAL ISSUES DISCUSSED DURING THE LEE VISIT. TAN POINTED OUT THAT, IN EFFECT, THERE ARE NO BILATERAL PROBLEMS BETWEEN THAILAND AND SINGAPORE.

4. BEFORE DEPARTURE FOR SINGAPORE JAN. 21 PRIME MINISTER LEE READ STATEMENT TO PRESS REGARDING VISIT. PRINCIPAL POINTS IN STATEMENT INCLUDED FOLLOWING:

"....ON BALI SUMMIT, WE AGREED THAT A POSTPONEMENT IS UNNECESSARY AND THAT THE SUBJECTS WE AND OUR OFFICIALS HAVE DISCUSSED AT ASEAN CAPITALS, AND LAST WEEK IN KUALA LUMPUR, SHOULD BE FURTHER PROCESSED AND REFINED. BOTH SIDES BELIEVE DETAILS OF THE BROAD HEADS OF AGREEMENT SHOULD BE SPELLED OUT AT THE MEETING OF OFFICIALS TO BE HELD FROM 5-6 FEB. AND CONFIRMED AT THE MEETING OF (FOREIGN) MINISTERS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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ASEAN FROM 9-10 FEB. IN PATTAYA.

"DURING MY DISCUSSIONS WITH PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT, I BECAME MORE AWARE OF THE REALITIES WHICH SHAPED THAILAND'S FOREIGN POLICIES. I NOW HAVE A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIRECTION AND THRUST OF PRIME MINISTER KHUKRIT'S POLICIES AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY UNDERLYING HIS CONCEPTS OF CO-OPERATION IN ASEAN. NEEDLESS TO SAY, MR. KHUKRIT EXPOUNDED

HIS VIEWS WITH A LUCIDITY, ELEGANCE AND HUMOR WHICH ALWAYS ARREST ATTENTION AND CONCENTRATION."

5. IN BRIEF QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WHICH FOLLOWED STATEMENT, FOLLOWING MATTERS OF INTEREST CAME UP (TEXT PROVIDED BY USIS):

(BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED EXCERPTS)

Q....DI YOU DISCUSS THE AMERICAN TROOP WITHDRAWAL FROM THAILAND?

LEE..NO. WE DID NOT....

Q....DO YOU THINK THAT THE DISSOLUTION OF THE PRESENT THAI PARLIAMENT HAS ANY EFFECT (ON) ASEAN POLICIES TOWARD THAILAND?

LEE..NO, I DON'T THINK SO AT ALL. I THINK IT IS IN THE NATURE OF THINGS THAT GOVERNMENTS IN ALL COUNTRIES CHANGE FROM TIME TO TIME, AND POLITICAL LEADERS ARE RE-ELECTED AND SOMETIMES, OFTEN, AS IN MY CASE. BUT THE DIRECTION OF PEOPLES THAT THEY REPRESENT, THEIR INTERESTS--THEY DO NOT CHANGE. AND I THINK IT IS IN THE INTERESTS OF THE FIVE COUNTRIES OF ASEAN THAT WE GET CLOSE ON ECONOMIC MATTERS, ON POLITICAL COORDINATION AND THEN GO TO FOREIGN POLICY, INTELLIGENCE AND BEYOND. BUT IT HAS TO BE STEP BY STEP....

Q....ANY DRASTIC EXTENSION OF ECONOMIC COOPERATION COMING IN THE (ASEAN) SUMMIT CONFERENCE?

LEE..NO, I HAVE SAID IT HAS TO BE GRADUAL, IT HAS TO BE STEP BY STEP. THERE CAN BE NO WAVING OF THE MAGIC WAND AND TO-
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GETHER WE ARE IN THE COMMON MARKET. YOU HAVE BAHTS IN THAILAND, THEY HAVE RINGGITS IN MALAYSIA, THERE ARE PESOS IN THE PHILIPPINES, THERE IS A RUPIAH IN INDONESIA, WE HAVE THE DOLLAR IN SINGAPORE. SO IT NEEDS A FAIRLY LONG PERIOD OF TIME. BUT WE MUST DECIDE WHERE IT IS WE WANT TO GO AND TRY TO PHASE IT OUT.(END EXCERPTS).

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